

## **NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE (NHS).**

**Let me offer a number of different contexts to help us understand its significance.**

Comparing the establishment of the NHS to Nazism (yes he did!) Churchill's Conservative Party voted 21 times trying to prevent its introduction. And if we go back to Lloyd George's People's Budget of 1909 which tried to introduce what today we might describe as a Welfare State we can see that because the Tory dominated House of Lords voted against it we got, in 1911, both National Insurance and the curtailment of the power of the Lords. In other words, the NHS is not just about health. It is about the kind of society in which we wish to live. Sometimes you have to fight hard against a strongly resistant status quo determined to maintain or reintroduce inequalities.

I remember recovering from measles. My mother and the doctor were at the foot of my bed. "Penny on the drum", I heard the doctor say to my mother. In other words, cough up and pay. My mother could afford to pay. Many years later as one of my school students was writing the script for a Radio Merseyside programme based on her examination project about poverty we interviewed the local GP. If, we asked, before the NHS, you could not afford to pay for a doctor to treat a kid's sore throat what did you do? You wrapped round its neck a sock soaked in urine.

Perhaps you wish to confine such historical examples to some sort of long-gone Dickensian past. Let me provide another. Schools have log books to record unusual matters of significance. In the school in which I taught the log book recorded the names of young people that had left before the official leaving age (14). All left because of ill health. The pages were full, until you opened the page for 1948. It was empty. That was the year that the NHS was established and suddenly the poor were entitled to the same medication as the rich. I remember thinking that antibiotics had just been invented. Churchill, that enemy of the NHS, had been having them well before that date.

I was born the year that the Beveridge Report was published. He listed Five Evils. They were,

- want (caused by poverty)
- ignorance (caused by a lack of education)
- squalor (caused by poor housing)
- idleness (caused by a lack of jobs, or the ability to gain employment)
- disease (caused by inadequate health care provision).

In other words, health must not be seen in isolation. Once again, it challenges us to ask in what kind of society we wish to live. To put it another way, what are our social values? But what are the social values of our government?

Mostly these days we see those values demonstrated in England, not the U.K. There are no prescription charges in Wales.

My personal definition of politics is 'The inclusive discussion of and consensual arrival at social values'. To put it another way: inclusion good, exclusion bad. In 2010 we acquired the Coalition Government led by David Cameron. To describe its overall purpose I coined the term Social Fracking. It was, I felt, determined to destroy the foundations of society and to increase the distance between decision makers and decision receivers..Reviewing THE PRIVATE ABUSE of the PUBLIC INTEREST: MARKET MYTHS and POLICY MUDDLES - By Lawrence D. Brown and Lawrence R. Jacobs (2008), which is mostly about the administrations of George W Bush, I could not help thinking about The Notting Hill Set of Cameron, Osborne, Gove and Nick Boles. Declared admirers of Tony Blair they seemed to believe in what I characterised as Big Society, Small Government. In other words, as government reduced its regulatory role freedom would be given to barn-storming individuals and companies. Nick Boles is on record advocating chaos. Cameron put him in charge of, wait for it, planning.

Brown and Jacobs point out that, at least for George W, none of this worked. His attempt to reduce the role of government greatly increased it because all those barn-storming individuals and companies had to be regulated somehow. For state based government regulation was easier.

Today, notably for the NHS, the word 'reorganisation' is back. We still have not recovered from the last one in 2012 by Andre Lansley. My own experience of too many hospital visits includes senior nurses phoning friends to try to find the names and phone numbers of other senior nurses so that they could co-ordinate treatment. In any sphere this is what happens after reorganisation, especially when it is planned exclusively and not inclusively.

And now we are promised (threatened with?) a more centralising reorganisation. If central government has more power then it can privatise here and there more easily. We already have hospitals in the hands of non-tax-paying billionaires such as Richard Branson and G.P. surgeries owned and operated by companies in the USA. We would do well to think of British Rail. What happens when a company goes bankrupt? It is temporarily re-nationalised, run well and then sold off to another private company. This, as we used to say, is not the way to run a navy.

We may think of the NHS as the untouchable jewel in the Socialist Crown, though that would be to understate the part played by the old Liberal Party. It is not, I am afraid, untouchable. Those nurses trying to get in touch with other nurses will soon have to go through different companies with new names for old familiar roles and procedures. There will be no professional community and no connection with any kind of inclusive society. 'Chaos' really is what faces us.

**Cliff Jones, 26th. November 2021**

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